

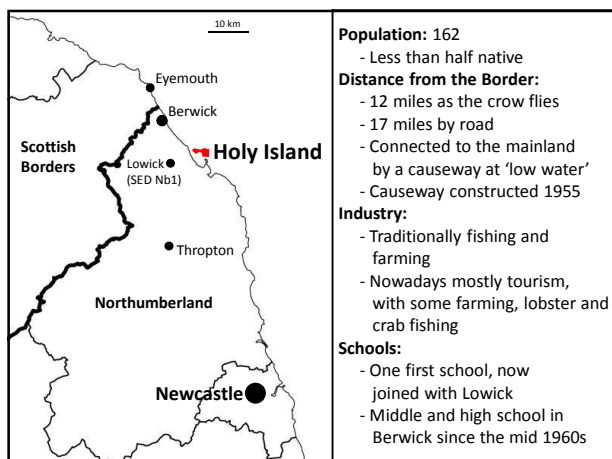
## The dialect of the Holy Island of Lindisfarne

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UKLVC9, 2013

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## Overview

- Background
  - the location, the corpus, the dialect
- The Holy Island dialect and the Scottish-English Border
  - the Scottish Vowel Length Rule (SVLR)
- Socio-phonological variation in the Holy Island dialect
  - the MOUTH vowel
  - realisation of onset /r/
  - dialect death



## The corpus

- Digitised reel-to-reel recordings (1971-3) of natives by Swiss PhD student Jörg Berger (Berger 1980)
  - c. 26 hrs, 10 main informants (3F, 7M), born 1893-1914 (the 'older' speakers), plus 1945M
  - conversations, answers to traditional dialect questionnaires (including the *Survey of English Dialects*, SED)
- Two hours of digital recordings (1945M), made by WM in 2006; interview and wordlists
- British Academy grant SG112357 (2012-1014)
  - Time-aligned orthographically transcriptions (ELAN)
  - To be hosted on the *Diachronic Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English* website (<http://research.ncl.ac.uk/decte/>)

## Other data

- Two *Millennium Memory Bank* (MMB) recordings from 1999
  - Conversational interviews with 1926M and 1965F
- *Diary of an Island* (Tyne Tees 2007)
  - Includes very short interviews with natives, mostly males (five born 1940s and five c. 1965+)
- New recordings of current natives of the Island
  - Watch this space...

## Speaker styles

- Questionnaire answers (q) (Q)
- Wordlists (1945M in 2006 only) (Q)
- Incidental conversation during questionnaire sessions (i) (C)
- Conversations (c) (C)
  - with interviewer
  - between Islanders, with interviewer present/taking part

| Speaker | Occupation                           | Corpus          | Styles       |
|---------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1893F   | 'Herring girl'                       | Berger          | q and i      |
| 1902F   | Shop keeper                          | Berger          | q and i      |
| 1908F   | Housewife                            | Berger          | c            |
| 1910F   | Housewife                            | Berger          | q and i      |
| 1903M   | Fisherman                            | Berger          | q and i      |
| 1904M*  | Wireless operator                    | Berger          | q and i, c   |
| 1905M   | Various jobs locally                 | Berger          | q and i, c   |
| 1906M   | Fisherman                            | Berger          | c            |
| 1908M   | Driver                               | Berger          | q and i, c   |
| 1910M*  | Fisherman, lifeboat man              | Berger          | q and i, c   |
| 1914M*  | Various, inc. Navy                   | Berger          | c            |
| 1926M*  | Merchant Navy, painter and decorator | MMB             | c            |
| 1945M   | Fisherman                            | Berger, WM 2006 | c, wordlists |
| 1965F   | Priory attendant                     | MMB             | c            |

'Older' speaker sample in red; speakers marked \* had higher status jobs, typically involving time and training away from the Island

Int. And this is?  
**1893F The door.**  
 Int. And, and, and the thing at the door?  
**1893F That's the handle, isn't it, or the -, aye, that's the handle.**  
 Int. Uh-huh. And on the other side, you know? These things, there.  
**1893F - The jambs of the door? Is that, do you mean the round about -**  
 Int. No, uh, these?  
**1893F Oh, that's the hinges.**  
 Int. Hinges?  
**1893F Hinges.**  
 Int. And this is?  
**1893F Tha-, that's the surroundings.**  
 Int. Surroundings?  
**1893F Surroundings.**  
 Int. Oh. Beautiful.  
**1893F Ye couldn't understand we.**

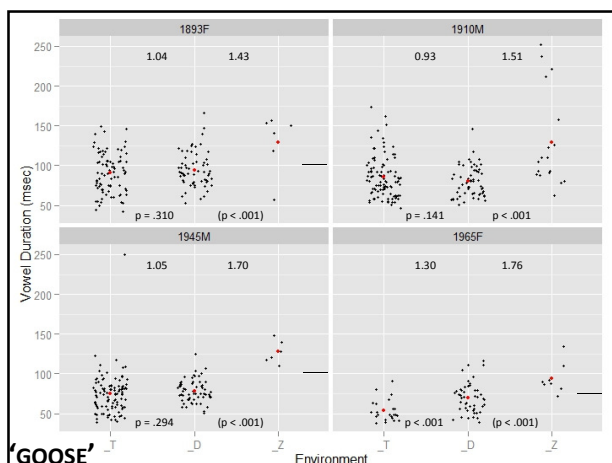
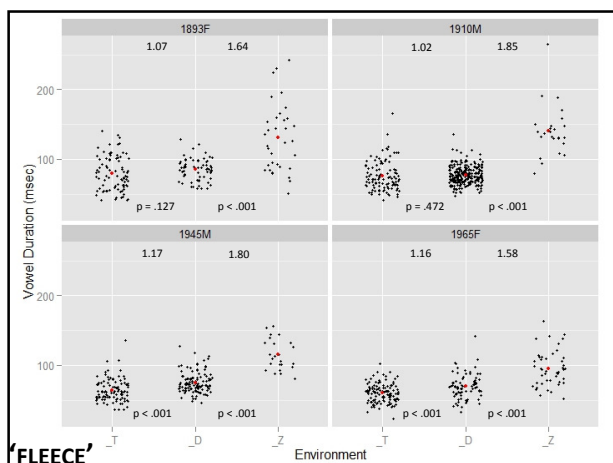
**1945M:** You **dinna** put any boxes upside **down** in the boat. B-, when you put your empty boxes in they've got to be the right way up. That used to be an **old man's**, an **old man's** super-. If the box is upside **down** some of them would **go home** again. If the box is upside **down** how the hell can you put **anything** in it? Everything's going to **fall out**. **So** that was a superstition. Another **one**. If possible get away from your moorings **without going** backwards. You know? You've got to go **ahead** if you can. It's **no** use going **astern**. You know? That's **no** bloody use. Whistling. **No** allowed to whistle in the boat. My **father** would, what, he would bloody kill me for, "Do you **no** think there's **enough** wind?". Aye. "**Without blowing any more?**"

### Research questions

- What evidence does the Holy Island dialect provide for the linguistic history and geography of the Scottish-English Border
  - the Scottish Vowel Length Rule
- What were traditional rural English dialect communities really like in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? How did they vary? Are there signs of incipient dialect death?
  - MOUTH vowel
  - Onset /r/ realisation

### The SVLR in the Holy Island dialect

- A form of the SVLR is operational in the Holy Island dialect
  - PRICE alternates between [ae]/[dɛ] and [ɛi]
  - KIT and STRUT are always short
  - /i/ ('FLEECE') and /u/ ('GOOSE') are subject to the SVLR
  - /e/, /o/, /ɛ/, /ɒ/ and /a/ are not, being longer generally, especially before voiced consonants
- Preliminary analysis of /i/ and /u/:
  - four speakers (1893F, 1910M, 1945M, 1965F)
  - all relevant /i/ and /u/ tokens
  - acoustic measurements of vowel duration, no normalisation
  - three categories: pre-voiceless (\_T), pre-voiced (\_D), pre-voiced fricative (\_Z) (/r/ is vocalised after /i/ and /u/)



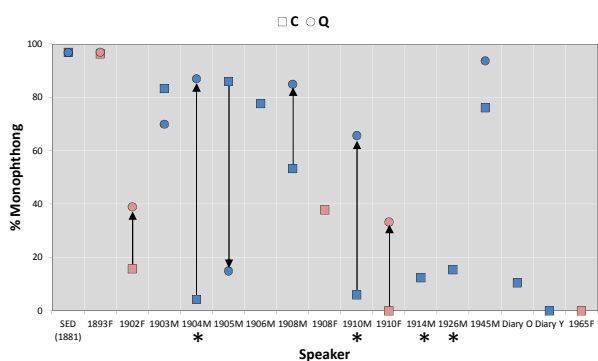
## The MOUTH vowel

- The vowel in words which had Middle English /u:/ (see Wells 1982: 151-2)
  - e.g. *about, brown, down, house, out*
- Monophthong retained in traditional Northern English and Scots dialects
  - see Johnston (1980), Beal (2000), Stuart-Smith (2003), Smith et al. (2007), Smith and Durham (2012) for analysis of this variable
- BUT diphthongised in morpheme final position in some dialects on either side of the Border (see Johnston 1997: 476), including Holy Island
- SED Nb1 (Lowick) has 96.82% monophthong in non-morpheme-final MOUTH

## Analysis of MOUTH

- Subset of data analysed
  - roughly 1 hour per speaker
- Morpheme final words excluded (always diphthongs)
- All other MOUTH tokens categorised as:
  - monophthong (typically short [ʊ] or [ʉ])
  - or as diphthong (typically [ʌʊ] or [ɒʊ])
- Average monophthong in the 'older' sample:
  - 50.18% across both styles (n = 811)
  - 70.34% in Q style, 38.96% in C style (p < 0.001)
  - 16/33 lexemes in C style, 29/33 lexemes in Q style (32/46 over all)

## Frequency of monophthongal MOUTH



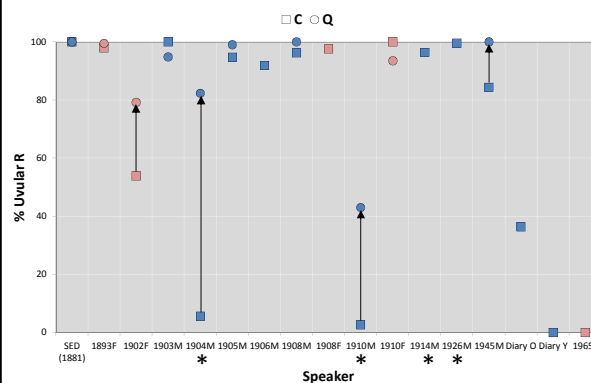
## Onset /r/ realisation

- The traditional realisation of /r/ in Northumberland is a uvular fricative [ʁ] or approximant [ʀ]
  - SED Nb1 has 100% uvular R
- Påhlsson (1972), Thropton:
  - “the Burr seems to be faced with fairly bleak prospects for the future, although it constitutes a prominent and vigorous feature of the dialect of the community at present” (p. 222)
- Beal et al. (2012: 40):
  - “The ‘Northumbrian Burr’ [ʁ] is nowadays completely absent from urban areas and indeed very rare in rural areas, so much so that its use by speakers is said by Beal (2008: 140) to be little more than a ‘party trick’.”

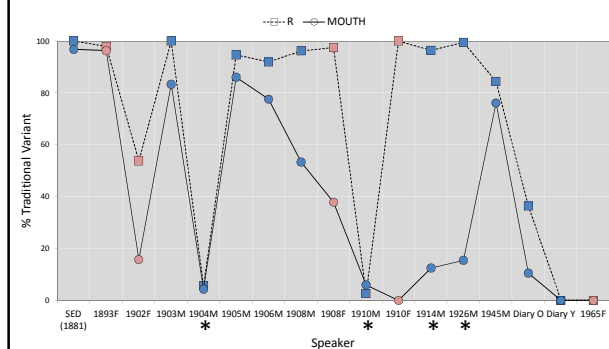
## /r/ analysis

- Subset of data analysed
  - roughly 1 hour per speaker
- Onset /r/ analysed only, three categories:
  - uvular [ʁ], [ʀ]
  - alveolar tap [ɾ] and trill [r]
  - post-alveolar approximant [ɹ]
- Average uvular in 'older' sample:
  - 67.62% across both styles (n = 2381)
  - 78.87% in Q style, 57.99% in C style (p < 0.001)
- 1910M is the only speaker with significant levels of alveolar taps/trills (12.72%)

## Frequency of uvular R



### The two features compared (C style only)



### Speaker types

- Broad (SED type) mono-dialectal speakers
  - 1893F, 1903M
- Broad-to-broader shifters
  - 1902F, 1908M, 1910F, 1945M
- Broad-to-less-broad shifters
  - 1905M
- ‘Bi-dialectal’ older ‘higher status’ speakers
  - 1904M, 1910M
- Standard English with uvular R (older ‘higher status’ speakers)
  - 1914M, 1926M, some Diary O
- Standard English without uvular R
  - 1965F, some Diary O, Diary Y

- Unsurprisingly, the corpus provides a much more complicated picture than traditional dialect studies
  - It confirms that SED-type patterns were not atypical for some older speakers in the sample, but there was a great deal of inter- and intra-speaker variation
- Monophthongal MOUTH and uvular R are clearly linked for some speakers (as they are in traditional dialect data)
  - They form part of a Holy Island ‘dialect package’
- But they have become decoupled for other speakers, with some speakers having high levels of uvular R but not of monophthongal MOUTH
  - Suggesting that the two features can have quite separate meanings, indexing different local identities

### Questionnaire style

- For most speakers, Q style involves higher (sometimes much higher) use of local variants
- Not ‘performance speech’ in the *It’s high tide on the sound side* sense (Schilling-Estes 1998)
- Rather speakers appear to be frequently and consistently targeting the most localised, ‘broader’ part of their variation space
  - or perhaps another dialect system altogether in the case of two of the ‘higher status’ males (but see Smith and Durham (2012) for discussion of problems with the notion of ‘bidialectalism’)
  - this broader form of speech is similar to that of the oldest informant and the SED and gives us an insight into how the dialect has changed

### Dialect death in Holy Island

- These traditional features are rare for some of the older speakers (especially in C style) and appear to be being lost entirely from the dialect (dialect death)
- We might, then, expect different kinds of dialect death *within* the same small community as a result of different personal ideologies and life histories (cf. Schilling-Estes and Wolfram 1999, who discuss differences *between* communities)
  - some speakers/sections of the community (e.g. fishermen) appear to be/have been ‘endocentric’, even though the community is ‘open’ to outsiders (Andersen 1988)
  - others (e.g. those who work in the tourist industry or those who lived and worked beyond the Island) are/were ‘exocentric’

- Exocentric speakers: dissipation or levelling
  - as natives are increasingly exposed to non-local varieties, either through their own choices or through dramatic changes in Island life
  - e.g. 1902F (shopkeeper), 1914M\*, 1926M\*, 1965F (priory)
- Endocentric speakers: population attrition, perhaps with dialect concentration
  - as fishermen (and socially isolated natives generally) become a dying breed (e.g. 1903M, 1906M, 1945M)
  - 1945M stands out as unusually broad given his birth date
  - he is one of the last native fishermen, very Island-oriented, quite superstitious
  - but he is the only one of his kind left...

## Conclusions

- There is much we can learn from legacy corpora like this about:
  - the linguistic constraints on traditional features
  - variation in traditional dialect communities, including stylistic and inter-personal variation
  - the kinds of speakers in traditional rural communities, and how they define themselves linguistically
  - the early stages of dialect death
  - the history, origins and geographical distribution of linguistic features
- Not possible without them as traditional regional dialects have often disappeared
- And that's even before we compare them to later corpora to give us an insight into change in real time!

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